

# The Christian News-Letter

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Edited by  
KATHLEEN BLISS

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**D**EAR MEMBER,

During the last few weeks a considerable amount of information about conditions in Germany has accumulated in this office. It takes the form of letters, memoranda and notes of conversations. We shall try in this News-Letter to summarize it and comment upon it.

## IS NEW LIFE IN GERMANY POSSIBLE?

London is at present plastered with posters recommending its citizens to visit an exhibition called "Germany under Control." Under the caption is a picture of an upturned German steel helmet out of which green corn is springing. It very nicely epitomises the dual aim of British policy—to keep Germany under control so as to prevent her from launching another war on the world, and at the same time to encourage new life to grow.

What is the situation which faces the Church in Germany? There is the possibility of new life, but the difficulties in the way of its springing up are overwhelming for all but the greatest souls. A great deal of the effort of the Church is absorbed in the Hilfswerk, the organization which is with considerable efficiency undertaking relief for refugees who have come into Germany from the East. The time and energy of many pastors are absorbed in this work. Everywhere pastors and congregations are limited in what they might do by the lack of buildings and all means of conveyance. The shortage of paper and the facilities for printing are devastating in their effect on the work of the Church. Just at this moment when people are hungering for ideas and for news of the outside world, it cannot be given. The works of Karl Barth, to quote only one example, were banned by the Nazis, and none of them were published in Germany. They still cannot be published there or brought into the country. We know of one keen German layman who on a brief visit to Switzerland sat up most of the night in the library, reading theological works and memorizing their contents so that he might carry back in his memory what he could not take with him even in note form on paper.

But the difficulties of the Church are not only in external conditions; they also lie within. The writ of the newly constituted

Evangelical Church does not run everywhere even within one zone. The majority of pastors want to get back to things as they were, to the day to day work with their own congregations. The action of Confessional leaders in admitting Germany's guilt and their own share in it strikes many pastors as unwise and unnecessary.

## DENAZIFICATION

The question of denazification is causing a seething ferment in the Church. On the one hand, it is true that many pastors were deeply compromised by their silence and their outward conformity, and it is impossible to deny that the spirit of Nazism had its outposts even within the Church. On the other hand, the means by which denazification is put into effect causes the utmost concern to good men. A bishop writes: "The day before yesterday I was visited by a doctor who had never been a Nazi, but who had been promoted in 1939 in title and salary as head of a hospital for the victims of the first world war. After seven months of imprisonment his case was at last examined more closely and it was ascertained that there was no reason for his arrest or his dismissal from office. Such mistakes are not infrequent." The available evidence goes to show that internment camps are on the whole well run, although food is desperately short, but the detention of many thousands of persons without trial for periods up to and exceeding a year is against the traditions of British justice. At the same time, the Churches find that men who are perhaps bearing a major part in the work of a congregation are suddenly run to earth for some connection with the Nazi party many years ago and are swept off without any reference being made to their subsequent record, and their posts are filled with inferior men. This cut-and-dried method of identifying the spirit of Nazism, which is the real evil, with membership of, or connection with, the Nazi party (however transitory) denies the possibility that men could ever have undergone a genuine change of conviction, and leaves at large the really dangerous man who has the roots of Nazism deep in his soul.

There is widespread disappointment in the Churches in Germany as the result of a year of British rule. Many pastors had hoped, and told their congregations to hope, that the British would bring with them some positive alternative to Nazism—that they would see in the administration justice, firmness and a policy. The difficulties with which the administration is faced at the top level in the conflicting aims of the occupying Powers, are too far away to be given due weight. On every hand they meet the restrictions of an administration which in its dealing with people in the localities is daily becoming a more entrenched and unyielding bureaucracy, wooden in its conception of its job, living in comfort or even luxury



amongst a desolated population—there for seven years on a fat salary—too short a stay for a man to make it a life work, too long for the man of conscience who might consider giving three years of a career to what he sees to be a task of critical importance. A few pastors come across the type of official who cares about his job and has imagination—but he is rare.

Meanwhile Church attendances are on the increase all over the British zone, both in Protestant and in Roman Catholic congregations. Local inhabitants go more frequently to Church, refugees from the East swell the numbers. A very large number of children attend Church. Are these increases the sign of a real return to religion, and is any real growth likely to take place from them? It is too early to tell. What is an undoubted fact is that there is a strong tinge of German fatalism in this return to religion. Many people go to Church for the happiness of being miserable in company rather than for inspiration to enable them to rise up and *act* in a desperate situation. There is evidence also that the Church is becoming reactionary in politics, falling foul of socialists and communists over relief work, emotionally too committed to a picture which connects Russians with rape and robbery to be able to accept more cheerful reports now coming from the Eastern zone.

## GERMAN YOUTH

Preoccupation with external difficulties and mounting congregations are tending to turn the minds of many in the Churches away from a matter of crucial importance—the spiritual condition of that generation which was raised on Nazi doctrine. But it is on what it is able to do for and with young people that the future of the Church depends.

There is no generalization to be made about the reaction of young people to the collapse of Nazism. Many want nothing but food and work and are disillusioned, embittered and hopeless. That number is being increased by the fact that hope for any of these things becomes more and more remote. A few, even of those who were in the heart of the Hitler youth movement, are thinking and searching and turning to the Church. It is tragic that those who probably could meet their needs, the young pastors, are still in prisoner of war camps; they fall to the care of older pastors. Young students work extremely hard and talk very little. In fact one of the chief symptoms which strikes observers is the *silence* of young people. They have little hope that hard work will bring them a job, and their personal plans are therefore not worth discussing. Their ideas they keep to themselves, because they have grown up in an atmosphere where one suspected everybody and gave one's confidence to none.

The few religious leaders who really understand the spiritual needs of German youth are overwhelmed by the stream of young people coming to them—and among those who come are some of the ablest of the generation.

## LIVING AS PERSONS

The Church has refused to create mass youth organizations under its aegis, but at the same time it is doubtful whether the alternative generally offered to youth is what is needed in the present situation. German clergy have been hemmed in, driven on to their own resources for twelve years. They tend to place their hope for youth in formal teaching of a somewhat text-book faith. What is lacking is the infusion of new ideas and new vigour which wider contact brings. Twenty-five German students recently allowed to go to Basle for joint study with members of the Swiss Student Christian Movement went back talking as though they had discovered a new world—as indeed they had.

The task which lies before both clergy and teachers in Germany is that of rebuilding personal values and restoring life in small groups through which the character of individuals is built up, and the shape of society is determined.

In this country we constantly talk about the place of the small voluntary organizations in the life of society and their importance as the foundation of democratic political life. These small groups feed the larger whole with its very life blood and if democracy ceases to exist in small groups it must inevitably die as a political institution. It is exactly the lack of this life in small groups which makes all talk of Germany becoming a democracy with democratic purposes so empty. One of our correspondents in Germany describes his attempt to get a certain piece of work done locally by democratic means. His committee met, the chairman made a statement, nobody else spoke, nobody wanted to speak or could see the point of speaking. It is just as simple as that, and to talk of democratic purposes as though democracy were a synonym for majority rule is no cure for the German sickness.

The re-creation of democracy in Germany is, therefore, at bottom not the setting up of political institutions but the rebuilding of personal relationships.

Here and there where British people on the spot have imagination and energy the seedlings of a new life are beginning to grow. One of our correspondents, for example, describes in a long and interesting letter his experience of bringing ten German boys aged between fourteen and seventeen into a British camp, where they were



to act as waiters in the mess. He decided to run them as though they were a small boys' club. It was quite impossible by frontal attack to argue them into an admission that their leaders had been wrong. When by common consent they shared rations and the general life of the soldiers their opinion of the British changed from a mixture of fear and contempt to trust and respect. For the first time in their lives they had personal dealings with a Jew (a British sergeant) and found him to be a man who befriended them and shared their life. They could not see the point of our General Election, arguing that it would only lead to party strife and nothing being done, and the idea of the leader of the Opposition being paid a salary caused days of discussion. Such a confrontal with another way of life is taking place on a very small scale where there are men and women who really care. It is happening, for example, in camps for school children, orphans, cripples and invalids, run by certain voluntary organizations. It is happening here and there in the churches in Germany—for example where a German pastor has succeeded in establishing relations of friendship with Poles in a D.P. Camp. But on the whole Germans have no contacts with anybody but Germans.

## LET IN THE AIR

It is quite vain to hope that the Churches in Germany can be a bulwark against communism or chaos or a revival of Nazism. The chances of a democratic-cum-Christian revival in Germany in the measurable future are frankly nil. For the Church the hope lies in seed so deeply rooted, and of such quality that when the storm (whatever form it may take) has passed over, it may grow and spread. One can hope that those who have Germany under control may give the chance for this seed to grow. But the soil is covered by a thick fog of stale air. Nothing can grow unless the wind is allowed to blow it away. We need to get students, pastors, Church leaders out of Germany for periods, to let civilians from elsewhere in, to start up the traffic in ideas, to expose the German people to something beyond their own experience of twelve years of unbreathable air.

At the same time our hopes of immediate results must be sober. These things will nourish the life of the few and in time bear fruit. The central question for the mass of the German people is *whether men can live with hope*. Hope is at present a greater lack than bread, though it includes the lack of bread.

Each day is a struggle with overwhelming circumstances for the great majority. The miseries of Nazi rule are being forgotten and its splendour, the work, the excitement, the purposefulness take on an added glory as they recede into the past, and the future looks black and forbidding. The expression most constantly on men's lips in

Germany is "No Way Out." Christians tend to use the word "Nihilism" with alarming ease: there are few who really understand the full depths of its horror. For it means the death of all that makes men truly human by the annihilation of hope. Men try to eat, to sleep, to keep warm. The functions of the body continue, but the soul of men has gone out of them. This is what is happening to millions of people to-day, and those on the continent of Europe who understand this tragedy know it as a horror without compare.

Christian people are prone to talk too easily of man's despair as the great opportunity of the Church. Such talk blurs the distinction between a man's *despair of himself* as a creative individual moulding and fashioning his own world from which many a man has turned to God, and *nihilism* which is a total despair not of oneself, but of the whole creation and of the creator. For if the creation offers men no hope of that sustaining of human life which is the creation's primary purpose, why should men turn from the creation which has cheated them to a creator who, if he exists, must be as bad, or worse?

## A CONTRAST

Those of us who were in London on V.E. Day a year ago are never likely to forget the experience—the tired and happy people, the universal note of relief and thankfulness, the spontaneity of the rejoicing, and the sense that we had been pulled back from the edge of the abyss. Everywhere people went into the Churches and said their word of thanksgiving. There was a queue outside St. Martin-in-the-Fields all day long and over 2,000 people passed through the Church.

On the official V. Day St. Martin-in-the-Fields opened its doors at three in the afternoon. In a few hours the building was a litter of paper, bottles and rubbish, and the clergy and churchwardens worked till late at night to make the place fit for Whitsunday worship. Part of the crowd broke into the Church school, wrenched open cupboards, tore up books, destroyed registers, wrecked a gramophone and three pianos, smashed windows, broke through the roof and did £950 worth of damage in a few hours.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

We print as a supplement to this issue the main substance of a speech given by the secretary of Friends' Relief Service to the yearly meeting of the Society of Friends. We are glad to be able to give space to a Quaker point of view on a vital matter.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss



## SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE GERMAN QUESTION

By ROGER C. WILSON

For many people in this country Germany appears to be the main European preoccupation. This is especially so for many pacifists and other people with strong humanitarian instincts. This emphasis needs some examination, for while there are legitimate reasons for giving special attention to the German question, there are also illegitimate and dangerous ones. Some people take the view that Germany's misery is greater than that of any other European country. Having travelled as a Quaker relief worker in a good many parts of Europe over the last eighteen months, and having spoken with Quaker colleagues who have worked where I have not visited, I do not believe that it is possible to compare national miseries. The exact nature of Germany's wretchedness differs from that of, say, France or Poland or Greece, but I doubt if it is any more perplexing. The material destruction is greater; the moral degradation of overwhelming defeat is for the time being greater than that of countries defeated and subsequently liberated. But in some respects, notably the far better condition of its people during the war years and its power to organize itself consistently behind a powerful and clearly seen policy, Germany is in a far stronger position than any other country in Europe. It is not good enough to say that Germany is the most miserable country in Europe.

European misery, either of body or spirit, will not be isolated nationally. It is total and must be held totally in the minds of concerned people—if they can get their minds to the totality of world suffering, as I hope they will. My own mind just boggles at the prospect. Others take the view that Germany claims special attention because she has been the principal enemy and some people feel drawn to care for our enemies because nobody else seems to do so. But this does not seem to me to be real either; for one notices singularly little concern on the part of most of us for, say, Italy or Japan. Frankly, I believe there is a considerable element of sentimentality plus personal preference in this interest in Germany. For a variety of fairly simple reasons we find it far easier to get alongside the individual Germans we happen to meet than we do to get alongside individuals of Latin or Slav or oriental nations.

This sentimentality plus preference which puts Germany at the centre of our European interest is most dangerous if it leads us to a lack of sense of proportion. But there is a legitimate reason for this interest and that is that in terms of politics and economics the members of the German nations are far and away the most important central block in Europe. Actually or potentially, the power of

Germans in relation to the life of all other Europeans is the major factor in European affairs—apart from the interest of Russia.

## A POSITIVE BRITISH POLICY IN GERMANY

Now there is not the least doubt that the economic and political policies being pursued by the Allies in relation to Germany are disastrous. These policies were very ably and clearly set out and criticized in five articles in *The Economist*, the first of which appeared on April 6th, 1946.<sup>1</sup>

We must, of course, avoid the mistake of thinking either that the British Government is all-powerful or that it is the main stumbling-block to better policies. But in this matter of Central Europe, I do not believe our Government has been as strong and as vigorous as it should be. With generations of conviction behind me that we should not interfere with the political set-up in other countries, it goes against the emotional grain to advocate an active policy of constructive interference, but I believe that merely to hold the political ring in Germany is to wait for disaster. In this respect, the Government seems to me to have lacked the courage of its convictions, but I do believe that its heart is in the right place, that what sense has been talked has been mostly talked by it and that military government in the British zone in Germany has so far been more deeply concerned with human welfare than that in any of the other zones. Anything we say to our own Government ought therefore to be encouragement to stand more bravely for constructive policies and not criticism for failure to secure greater foresight from three powerful allies whose interests are very different from ours.

## THE CONFLICT OF INTERESTS IN GERMANY'S FUTURE

That brings me to my next point—the difference of interests in the future of Germany felt by her neighbours. We British tend to underestimate these differences. Before the war Germany was our second-best customer in commerce. Economically we want a vigorous Germany. At the same time we have (or at least had in 1940, if we still think in those terms) *some* natural defence against sudden attack. But France has been invaded three times and beaten twice by Germany in seventy years and has quite different economic interests in Germany from ours. Our interest in a prosperous, united Germany seems as cold-bloodedly selfish to the French as their belief that the Allies can hold the Ruhr separate from Germany by bayonets seems crazy to us. Russia is also much more interested in a weak Germany, whatever the cost in backwardness in central and western Europe, than in a united one, and has little

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted as a pamphlet, called *The German Crisis*, by the National Peace Council, 144 Southampton Row, W.C. 1. 5d. post free.



cause, in contemplating history, to be convinced that western democracies will not use a strong Germany for an attack on communist Russia. We here in this country may be convinced that public opinion just would not stand for a war with Russia, but by far the most frequently expressed political view you meet with in Germany to-day is the absolute conviction that there will be war between Russia and the English-speaking powers in which Germany will be on the Anglo-Saxon side. The Russians, knowing our natural sympathy with many Germans and much German thinking, can hardly be blamed for taking this German public opinion seriously, however baseless it may be.

## THE EUROPEAN MEMORY OF GERMANY

Against that over-simplified, but not over-drawn background, is it surprising that political and economic agreement among the major Allies is difficult? But let me put the matter in the much more personal terms that are real to millions of continental Europeans. In mid-May some relief workers and I were in a large Greek mountain village between five and six thousand feet up. At 4 o'clock on a December morning in 1943 the German army came up through the snow and systematically set to work to destroy the place, so that two days later not one single roof remained intact. Most of the people got away up the snowy hillside, but twenty-two old people and invalids were burned to death. For three hard winters those hungry villagers have made do in improvised hovels among the ruins or have been refugees in other villages. The Germans had provocation. The village *was* a centre of Greek resistance and *was* a centre for collection and distribution of arms dropped by the R.A.F. But to us and to its inhabitants the consequences of understandable resistance seem inexpressibly brutal.

Or again, a few months ago I was talking to the acting commandant of a D.P. camp in Germany. He was a twenty-three year old Polish boy and I asked him how he came to be in Germany. He was walking in the country outside his home town in Poland in the spring of 1940 with a group of friends, when suddenly armed Germans jumped out of a truck and bundled the whole lot in. After travelling in prison wagons for some days, they found themselves forced labourers in the heart of the Reich.

These aren't isolated stories. I could give scores and my Quaker colleagues living and working in Europe could give hundreds of authentic accounts of what Nazi domination actually meant in personal terms in Germany and elsewhere. The horrors perpetrated by the Black and Tans in Ireland after the last war fill us with shame. But in all honesty I believe it is true that nothing done in our name has been nearly equal in extent or policy to what has been done in the name of Germany over most of Europe. And liberated European

peoples are not, under these circumstances, predominantly interested in discussions demanding economic and political foresight. We can talk political and economic sense about Germany and Europe as long and as lucidly as we like, but it won't cut any ice at all with people whose emotions have, quite understandably, been roused to such a pitch as have those of occupied and liberated Europe.

I still haven't touched on the worst aspect of the lot—the degree to which the occupation, consciously or not, succeeded in dividing and weakening the confidence of people in one another. The war drew us British together as never before. While it also drew a larger or smaller proportion of members of European nations together everywhere it divided some absolutely. And to every European there has come a startling and horrible revelation of how deeply he can hate. Moreover, every European has seen the mixture of much coward and a little hero that is in most of us, even the most apparently worthy. Most have lied and stolen and deceived for good and bad reasons. And their neighbours know it. Who can be quite sure that his neighbours, tradesmen, statesmen have abandoned these practices? Europe is left wondering if anybody can ever be wholly trusted again. This is the outcome of the German occupation imposed on the weakness of human nature.

## GERMAN BEHAVIOUR—PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE

And what of the other side of this—the outlook of the ordinary German citizen? Here there are two facts. On the one hand, while Europe is full of evidence of the ghastly corporate brutalities of Germans and their satellites, almost every person with whom I have spoken who had Germans quartered on them speaks well of them as men—well-behaved, not brutal, always “correct” and quite often actively kind and helpful. They go on to say that this personal human decency appears to have been totally unrelated to the military duties involving the burning of villages or the shooting of hostages. In short, Europe is troubled, as indeed is Germany herself, by the gap between personal decency and organized brutality; and nobody is sure where one will end and the other begin in the individual.

This is one aspect of the problem of the Germans expelled from politically non-German territory. The Nazis preached that every German was a German first and always, wherever he lived, with a duty to betray his adopted homeland. Enough Germans acted in this way to convince their political hosts that the Nazis were right in their doctrine and that there is only one safe way with German minorities and that is to get rid of them. That the average German citizen or person of German descent is a decent human being in private life is of no interest to Europe politically to-day. Doubtful about the integrity of his own nationals, the liberated citizen has



no confidence at all in even the most upright looking German. Nazi teaching exaggerated the badness of all human nature, including German, but there was enough in it to produce a general conviction that it is safer not to trust any German. This makes it hard for any German to serve Europe.

## GERMAN REACTION TO EUROPE'S SUFFERINGS

On the other hand, I can find no evidence that among the Germans in Germany there is any substantial interest in or appreciation of what has been done in their name in Europe. In the midst of their own misery this is understandable enough, but when a German talks to you about the ruin of his own city and you talk to him about the hunger of the south of France and remind him of Goering's assertion that whoever starved in Europe, it would not be the Germans; when you talk about the ruins of Warsaw, the hopelessness of many D.P.'s or the burnt villages of Greece, he isn't really interested.

There are great and noble exceptions—large numbers of them—but the prevailing temper of Germany, in my judgment, is against recognition of, or interest in, the way in which the name of Germany stinks throughout Europe or of the fact that it is only Germans who can restore her good name. Yet this again is understandable enough; for without a government, without a corporate voice, without economic or political hope, without leaders and without good newspapers, how can the average German take an interest in Europe, and how can a constructively minded and imaginative German begin to call his fellow Germans to a better sense of international responsibility? Occasionally, an inspired German does manage to break through all the frustrations. I know one heroic pastor who refused to yield an inch to Hitler and yet survived in a Nazi stronghold by reason of his prophetic qualities—wonderfully Old Testament, in fact—who has managed to get Germans and local Polish D.P.'s to meet one another as fellow-citizens. But everything is against anything as hopeful as this.

And so we and Europe and the Germans are all involved in one vast vicious circle of different national interests, irrational emotional attitudes, ill-informed leaderless groups, antipathies which run deeper than foresight; and over us all hangs the spectre or actual fact of hunger and cold. Any single aspect of this situation might be tackled in a sort of way by the normal techniques of economic, political or cultural statesmanship. But the whole lot together are well beyond such solutions.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The following suggestions are of varying importance:—

(i) All actively interested people should understand and digest the economic issues, as set out in the articles referred to earlier in

*The Economist.* If they can extend the circulation of this point of view, so much the better.

(ii) We should all go on pressing for as equitable as possible a distribution of the world's food, as a contribution to a sense of world responsibility.

(iii) We should proclaim, in season and out, the insufficiency of purely political and economic reasoning and policies. This is not because politics and economics are irrelevant. They are essential. But they cannot be talked or worked out effectively unless there is a new and creative moral incentive. As things are at present there cannot possibly be anything better than compromise at the familiar barren level. We need a way out of the vicious circle of mutually distrustful safeguards. We simply must get away from British policy, French policy, Russian policy to a European policy. Such an achievement is going to demand for its fulfilment far more than a simple forgetting of old scores and a willingness to compromise, dictated by exhaustion.

Seeking justice, men dispute over degrees of responsibility and are soon back in the desert of frustration. The righteousness of God is infinitely wider than the justice of men, and only in his righteousness can we find our way through. To understand his righteousness there must be a great and unreserved sense of mutual forgiveness, because that must be a preliminary to being able to accept the forgiveness of God. Once there is this sense of repentance in relation to God and one another, men can begin to see how to put their world together again.

Our long history as "top nation" and our recent partial responsibility for the atom bomb pile up a pretty big account of what is to be forgiven us. The crimes done in the name of Germany are far greater than most Germans realize. Relatively remote from most of them, it is easier for us to forgive than for those who suffered much more directly and who live in much greater fear. It is easy for us to talk and pray at a superficial level. But if we come to this matter deeply enough, we can play a part in a Christian search for forgiveness, the finding of which can give the condition for the healing of Europe.

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